FROM THE EDITOR

American Journal of Alternative Agriculture has always striven to maintain high professional standards to ensure that its articles are always significant, authoritative, and reliable. To help us do this, an immense service is performed by the many people who volunteer their time to review submitted manuscripts. Besides advising us on whether a paper merits publication—whether it makes a valuable contribution and is technically valid—they also make many worthwhile suggestions to improve the quality of those papers that are accepted. We are very grateful for this invaluable assistance; to state it very simply, without it, this journal could not exist. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the people who have served as reviewers during the past five years.

William Lockeretz, Editor

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INSTITUTE NEWS

New Report Helps Readers Understand Pesticide Reduction

A new report from the Wallace Institute helps readers understand and evaluate the economic predictions in studies about restricting the use of, or reducing the risks from, agricultural pesticides. *The Myths and Realities of Pesticide Reduction: A Reader's Guide to Understanding the Full Economic Impacts*, by Edward Jaenicke, investigates the common themes in a diverse body of current research on pesticide economics.

The full implementation of last year's Food Quality Protection Act is likely to generate a new round of economic studies that attempt to predict the impacts on consumers and agricultural producers of the loss or restriction of certain pesticides, according to the report. It is also likely to rekindle a debate which centers on two premises: that the health and/or environmental risks of using certain pesticides may outweigh their economic benefits, and that using pesticides is not the only way to control agricultural pests effectively.

There are four reasons why studies on the consequences of pesticide reduction confuse or inadvertently mislead readers, according to the new report:

- Current studies often do not examine the benefits of pesticide reduction. Nonregulatory studies almost always focus only on the costs of pesticide reduction.
- Farmers usually learn to cope with new regulations through innovative adjustments. Most studies quote experts who predict that crop yields will decline when broad restrictions are imposed on pesticide use, ignoring the fact that farmers and pest-control suppliers can innovate with pest-control approaches.
- Current studies do not always put predicted costs in perspective. Statistics on the costs of pesticide reduction can be used misleadingly, when they could actually advance the cause of pesticide reduction.
- Current studies generally ignore the full range of policy alternatives. Economic impact research has focused largely on direct pesticide restrictions such as bans or cancellations.

The first step toward understanding studies on the impacts of pesticide reduction is identifying major issues that may be unclear to readers, according to the new report; the second step is to look at the assumptions that underlie the predictions made in those studies. Here is the report's checklist of questions to ask about those assumptions:

- How flexible are the pest-control policy mechanisms examined in the study?
- How far would the restriction shift policy from the status quo?
- How are the effects of pesticide reductions on yields calculated?
- How are researchers calculating the costs to consumers of farmers' efforts to reduce pesticide use?
- What role does international trade play in assessing the impact of pesticide reduction?
- Do researchers take into account where and how crops are grown as a result of pesticide reduction?
- How do researchers approach the issue of food quality?
- Do researchers ignore environmental-related benefits from reduced pesticide use?
- Do researchers ignore the production-related benefits of reduced pesticide use?

The report also makes recommendations for researchers analyzing pesticide reduction strategies who are trying to clarify the scope and inherent limitations of their work.

The Myths and Realities of Pesticide Reduction is $6 from the Wallace Institute, 9200 Edmonston Rd., #117, Greenbelt, MD 20770; (301) 441-8777; e-mail hawiaa @access.digex.net

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